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CITY OF BOSTON MAYOR THOMAS M. MENINO

GUIDE TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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would like to invite you to participate in *Boston 400* - the City's first comprehensive planning effort since the publication of the 1965 General Plan for the City of Boston.

*Boston 400* will guide the City to its 400th anniversary in the year 2030.

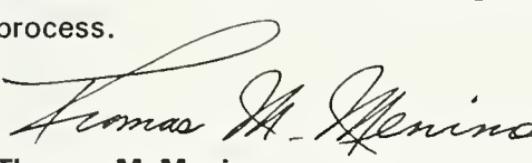
By working with residents and community and business leaders, we hope to develop a consensus on a vision for how the City should look and deal with its major challenges and opportunities as we enter a new millennium. Together, we need to chart a course for our neighborhoods, transportation system, parks and open spaces, housing, port and waterways, and business and cultural districts.

Since the initiation of the 1965 plan, which focused on reviving Boston's downtown, we have seen major changes in the way the City looks and works. Probably the most important change has to do with the way we view neighborhoods and community groups. Today, we understand how important public participation is in any planning process. The people who live in the City's rich and varied neighborhoods - more than even the most expert planners and designers know the textures and shapes of their places.

That is why the Boston Redevelopment Authority has put together *The Boston 400 Guide to Community Participation*. We want you - the citizens of Boston - to play a major role in *Boston 400*. We want you to get together with your community associations, your family and friends, your co-workers, and anyone who is interested in the future of the City. We want you to ask basic questions about the places where you live, work, and play. And then we want you to tell us what you think as we plan Boston for its 400th birthday.

The planning of Boston for a new and exciting era begins here. Thank you for being a part of that process.



  
Thomas M. Menino

Mayor of Boston

**W**hen Mayor Thomas M. Menino announced *Boston 400* - a long-term planning effort that will guide the City to its 400th birthday in the year 2030 - he made a commitment to involve all people who live and work in the City.

Community involvement begins with the people in the neighborhoods. Residents know their neighborhoods best. They know what they need to better raise a family, work at their jobs and participate in community events. They know what we need to become an even more livable City.

As we examine our own neighborhoods, we also need to think about the City as a whole. We need to think about how we can make better connections among the neighborhoods and the downtown, and to the excellent urban resources that Boston has to offer.

*The Boston 400 Guide to Community Participation* is designed to help people throughout the City ask important questions about how they live, work, and play in Boston. If we can get together to explore these questions, then we can develop a common vision for Boston.

The goal of *Boston 400* is simple: To make our City a better place to live and work. The best way for government to achieve that goal is to improve what planners call the public realm. The public realm is the space that we share in common. It includes the City's streets and sidewalks, parks and waterfront, houses and commercial districts, schools and museums, universities and entertainment centers.

A strong public realm enhances everyone's well-being. By enhancing what we have in common, we improve the prospects for our families and businesses.

A constant theme of *Boston 400* is the connection between the City's physical makeup and its economic and social life. Of course, physical space cannot, by itself, define the City. People in the private and public sectors - businesses, nonprofit organizations, and schools, play a critical role in making the City work. But everyone does better when the City's physical foundation is strong.

Part of the connection between the physical City and the social and economic city is Boston's history. Paying attention to history means more than saving a graceful old building or developing an old part of town. It also means involving people in the life of their community. It means pooling resources to revitalize neighborhoods and making affordable housing available for all. It means respecting the strong and enduring elements - physical, social, economic - that have made Boston a thriving city.

The economic dimension of the public realm is especially important as Boston prepares for a new age of information, technology, and commerce. Economic vitality depends not just on proximity to raw materials or large pools of labor. It depends on being part of a vast, diverse, comfortable, and efficient system. The cities that succeed in the new economic age will be the ones that offer businesses and workers not just one or two advantages, but access to a wide range of activities and attractions.

Consider *The Boston 400 Guide to Community Participation* to be a conversation starter. Most members of the community will agree on many basic principles. But there is also room for disagreement. Every neighborhood does not need the same basic design features or amenities; sometimes, arrangements that succeed in one neighborhood would fail in another. The questions here are designed to stimulate thought rather than set an inflexible ideal.

# THE NEIGHBORHOOD



The neighborhood is the basic unit of our City. Neighborhoods offer not only a place to live, but also a wide range of economic and social pursuits, as well as gateways to other parts of the City and the wider metropolitan area. Each neighborhood has its own character, but all neighborhoods

must offer a sense of security and belonging. Ideally, neighborhoods form a mosaic of subcultures that help people to find solidarity with their own smaller community, and also enjoy open access to the whole City.

## The Feel Of The Place

What is it about your neighborhood that you find special or distinctive? Does your neighborhood have enough interesting sights and sounds? Is there some kind of center or street where people go to "see and be seen"? Do all kinds of groups - young and old, students and workers, family households and individuals - live and work in the neighborhood?

## Identity

Does your neighborhood have a coherent identity? Does it have a name? Does the neighborhood have some kind of entryway or clearly identifiable sections? Is it easy to understand where you are and where you're going? Does the neighborhood have interesting landmarks or other physical traits that identify it (signs, architecture, style of sidewalks or parks)? Are the neighborhood's boundaries clear? Does the neighborhood offer ways for people to come together from all over?

## Makeup

How many people live and work in your neighborhood? Does the neighborhood accommodate different kinds of people - singles and young couples, children, families, old people, and people from different ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds? Does the neighborhood offer a variety of activities for different kinds of people? Are there specific places and events where people encounter people with different

ages and backgrounds? Is there a neighborhood center or building that brings people together?

### Convenience

Are there places nearby for groceries or other basic needs? Is it easy for you to move around, by car, public transit, or walking? When you leave the neighborhood, is it for shopping, recreational activities, visiting friends and relatives, or going to work? How does the movement of people in and out of your neighborhood affect the area's character? How do people regard surrounding neighborhoods?



### Security

Is the neighborhood a safe place for children to play? Is it safe for the elderly and handicapped to move about? Can you walk around without feeling vulnerable to the traffic? Where are the trouble spots for pedestrian safety?

### Organization

Does your neighborhood have associations and institutions that are dedicated to the wellbeing of the community? Do these groups have access to the space and resources they need? Are there places where people can go for help and support to deal with problems and issues of everyday life?



# THE PUBLIC REALM



The public realm is the space that community members and visitors share in common. Public spaces include streets, sidewalks, parks and other open spaces, community gardens, monuments, museums, and schools and other public buildings. The public realm also includes many privately owned spaces - to the extent that these spaces affect people throughout the community. Front porches and stoops, churches, community associations, store windows and other building facades, restaurants and stores, and even lobbies of hotels and office buildings all have important public dimensions. All of these spaces need to be open and inviting for the community to prosper from a vibrant public realm.

## Streets and Sidewalks

### Physical Characteristics

Does your neighborhood, and the other places you go in the city, offer enough space for walking? Are the sidewalks and other paths attractive? Are the walkways comfortable during the extreme hot of summer and cold of winter? Are pedestrian spaces well lit at night? Do streets and sidewalks have clear signage or "markers" along the way for orientation (especially on long blocks)? Are the sightlines good? Can you see and do a variety of interesting things along major streets?

### Safety

Do the roads and walkways feel safe? What makes them safe or unsafe? Are there adequate buffers from street traffic? Do the people on the streets and sidewalks look out for others? Can younger residents walk safely and easily to school, a park, a library, a social club, or other gathering places? Can older people move around with comfort and ease? Do you get the sense that someone is looking out after you? Do graffiti, broken windows, or similar problems project a negative image and create discomfort?

## Connections

Do the streets and buildings make an attractive place to visit? Is there a sense of continuity in the streets, parks, and building styles? Does this continuity contribute a sense of order in the neighborhoods? Can you see the way the parts of the neighborhood - streets, buildings, parks, schools, homes - relate to each other? Do people have visibility in and out of buildings, so there is a relationship between what goes on inside and outside?



## Circulation

Are all forms of transportation - car, bus, subway, bike, pedestrian - respected and enhanced? Does automobile traffic circulate so that it does not damage neighborhoods, business districts, parks, and the like? Are there appropriate places for bicycles? Are pedestrians comfortable and safe? Are the sidewalks wide enough to encourage walking and socializing?

## **Parks and Open Spaces**

### **Places To Go**

Is there a convenient place for people to go outside their home for recreation within a 10- or 15-minute walk? Is that space somehow special? Does it have a clear identity and sense of history? Is there a comfortable and well-marked place to wait for people? Do people of different ages and physical abilities have access to parks and open spaces that meet their needs? Is access to major parks and open spaces outside your neighborhood convenient by public transit or bicycle?

### **Safety**

Do parks and other recreational spaces offer you a sense of security? Can you walk to and from the parks safely and without unwanted attention? Do you feel safe inside the parks? Are there a variety of people in the park who can help if problems arise? Do the places of recreation feel welcoming to young and old, insider and outsider? Can you allow youngsters to play with minimal supervision?

### **Design**

Do the parks and other open spaces have a clear definition? Can the park be used for a variety of activities? Does the park take advantage of its sunny spots, hills and valleys, and vegetation? Does the park make the best out of the gloomy northern side of walls and buildings? Is there access to basic necessities - food, toilets, supplies - to make a day at the park possible? Does the park offer places with different degrees of "publicness" so that everyone is comfortable? Can you easily find places to sit (benches, chairs, walls, steps)? Can you find things to observe? Is the park active at different times of day? Can the park be used in different seasons? Is it possible to hold occasional festivals and fairs?

### **Upkeep**

Are the parks and open spaces maintained well? Is cleanup left to Parks Department employees, or do the users of the park actively engage in care of the park and have a sense of ownership or stewardship?

## **Public Buildings**

### **Fit**

Are public buildings integrated with the life of the community? Do the buildings help to foster "feeder" services and activities? Are there buildings for people to come together to deal with community issues? Do the buildings sit in prominent places? Are buildings accessible by public transit? Do you have a strong sense of orientation when using the buildings?

### **Image**

Do public buildings advertise the community to outside visitors in the best possible light? Do the buildings express important civic values? Are the buildings interesting to look at - whether it's the overall architecture or the details of murals and other ornamentation?

### **Buildings And Streets**

Do the walls of buildings help to create comfortable public spaces? Do the neighborhood's "outdoor rooms" offer a safe, and stimulating place for people to be in public? Are the building's activities within sight and earshot of people on the street, and vice versa?

## **Points of Interest**

### **Historic Sites**

Can you clearly identify places of historic significance? Are these places maintained well? Can visitors find them and enjoy them easily? Do the sites offer ways to learn about their significance - pamphlets, signs, or other markers? Are there logical paths to follow to visit the historic places and other interesting sites in the area? Can you find places to pause during your visit - a bench, a cafe, or a lunch spot?

### **Things To Do**

Are there plenty of activities at different times of day, so that the area has a 24-hour presence of positive influences? Does your neighborhood have "night spots" for people of all ages? Are these night spots close to a cluster of a half-dozen other activities? Can you find a safe, sheltered place to sit and wait for friends or transit?

## PRIVATE SPACES



Private spaces are places where people can seek refuge from the exposure and activity of the public realm - places where people can "recharge their batteries" and spend time with family and friends. Good private spaces offer a sense of intimacy and privacy. Without meaningful private spaces - homes, churches, and associations - it would be difficult to face the whirlwind of public life every day. Ideally, private spaces give you the security of "a place apart," but also help you relate to the larger world around you. Private spaces like windows, porches, yards, landscaping, and walkways all offer an intermediary space - a connection - between the private and public realms.

### Homes

#### Access

Does the City and your neighborhood offer an acceptable range of housing types? Is there an appropriate mix of single-family dwellings, multi-family dwellings, and apartment buildings? Does the housing stock help families deal with their evolving makeup and their shifting challenges? Is housing affordable? Is the neighborhood's housing accessible to jobs, transit, and important goods and services? Do people have the opportunity to own their own homes?

#### Sociability

Do your neighborhood's homes offer places for people to enjoy looking at street activity - porches, stoops, a sitting place in the yard, or windows with good views? Do the fronts of homes present attractive views to passersby? Is it easy and safe for people to move back and forth between their homes and the street?

## **Privacy**

Does the neighborhood's housing offer adequate privacy? Is the home a "haven" from the pressures of the outside world? Do houses offer a good window view of the outdoors, so that you can better appreciate the contrast between the public and private realms?

## **Safety**

Do people feel secure in their homes? Do they feel safe in the immediate vicinity of their homes? Are there places where children can leave the house to meet and play with others? Are there plenty of places for kids to explore without adult supervision? Do the homes encourage a friendly "eyes on the street" system of community surveillance and support?

## **Private Social Institutions**

### **Access**

Does the neighborhood offer a variety of institutions - churches, ethnic clubs, health clubs, and so on - where people can pursue private interests and values? Are these organizations able to maintain their own distinctive character? Do they enjoy the community support they need to survive?

### **Connections**

Do these social institutions help people feel connected with the neighborhood? With the City? With other important communities in the City?

## **Business Spaces**

### **Basic Services**

Do private businesses - from small kiosks to larger production facilities - have access to the materials, equipment, and services they need? Is access to these means of production convenient and economical? Are there efficient means of getting goods to market? Does the transportation serve the company's workers well?

### **Connections**

Do businesses have the linkages they need with other businesses in related fields? Do they have access to places to eat and play? Are there other elements of community that help foster creativity?

## **TRAFFIC AND CIRCULATION**

A dynamic community requires balanced and efficient systems of transportation to help people move around town. Different modes of transportation need to be coordinated, so that everyone enjoys access to the whole City. It's important that no one form of transportation - like cars and trucks - undermine others. The different forms of transportation need to reinforce and be compatible with each other, so it's convenient and pleasant to move from one to another.

### **Major Roads and Highways**

#### **Scale, Design, and Legibility**

Do the roads and highways fit the scale and needs of the community? Are important routes easy to identify and follow? Do the heavily trafficked roads respect the cohesion of the community? Do the major roads form rings around the communities, so people enjoy ready access, but avoid the destructive tendencies of through traffic?

#### **Safety**

Are the roads safe for drivers and pedestrians alike? Is there enough room for both? Are there clearly marked places - median strips, sidewalks, green spaces - for people to find refuge from traffic? Do the roads use appropriate "calming" techniques - stop signs and lights, speed humps and dips, brick or other textured walkways, street-narrowing systems - to make sure that cars do not race through areas where people walk?

#### **Parking**

Is there adequate parking for both private and commercial vehicles? For both permanent residents and visitors? Do people find it safe and easy to get to their cars? Does the parking respect the visual appeal of the area? Does it respect the social processes of the area? Is parking put behind buildings as much as possible? Is there enough parking to sustain local business activity - but not so much parking that economic and social life is overwhelmed by "dead space"?

## **Public Transportation**

### **Variety and Connections**

Is public transit accessible to all? Does public transportation - bus, subway, minibus, ferry - give everyone access to the basic necessities of life? Can people make quick and easy connections so they can get wherever they want to go in the City? Do public transit routes relate to areas of major employment, commercial activity, and residences?



### **Comfort and Safety**

Do the basic elements of safety - brisk activity, eyes on the street, well-lighted spaces, absence of vacant spaces - offer people a secure place to wait for public transit? Are there useful services connected with nodes (e.g., coffee shops, kiosks, dry cleaners)? Is there some kind of shelter from the elements?

## **Pedestrian Routes**

### **Access**

Can you easily find useful and interesting places to walk? Are there a number of places to walk - to do chores, visit people, or simply enjoy time outdoors? Are the pedestrian routes safe? Do walkers have a number of choices of routes to follow? Are sidewalks wide enough to accommodate many pedestrians and street activities? Are there attractive and safe places for runners and roller-bladers? Are pedestrian routes accessible and safe for persons with disabilities?



### **Connections**

Do sidewalks and other pedestrian paths offer connections to other forms of transportation? Do they offer access to a wide variety of activities? Can people who cannot drive - children, elderly, and others - walk safely to their destinations or public transportation?

## Bicycle Pathways

### Accessibility and Connections

Can a person use a bicycle to get all around the neighborhood and to points beyond? Are bike routes clearly marked? Can bicyclists make easy connections from streets to bike paths to parks and other spaces? Are bike paths and racks accessible to public transit and commercial nodes? Are there designated places for waiting?



### Safety

Are bicycle routes safe for both bike riders and pedestrians? Is it clear where bicyclists, pedestrians, and vehicles belong? Are there convenient and safe places to store and lock bikes? Do families and children feel safe riding their bikes?

## **GOODS AND SERVICES**



Everyone in the community should enjoy quick and easy access to inexpensive and reliable goods and services. Families and students, old people and children, and large and small businesses all need to get basic goods to survive day to day. They also need access to "nonessentials," the goods and services that simply make life more pleasant and stimulating. For businesses to survive, they need to be part of a cluster of many other businesses, so they attract enough customers and also have access to "feeder" businesses. At the same time, it's important to avoid overdevelopment, so supply does not exceed demand.

### **Household and Community Needs**

Can people in the neighborhoods get access to the necessities and important amenities of life - groceries, clothing, hardware, movies, bookstores, coffee-houses, restaurants, furniture? Are these goods reasonably priced compared to other parts of the city?

### **Business Needs**

Are affordable business spaces available for new entrepreneurial ventures with limited capital? Can businesses in successful neighborhoods afford to stay in the area? Can local enterprises get the goods and services they need? Are these local goods reasonably priced? If these goods and services are not available in the immediate vicinity, can they be obtained by a convenient trip?



## **TOWARD A BETTER BOSTON**

For much of its history, Boston has been known as one of America's most "livable" cities - a great place to live and work. The genius of Boston is knowing that a good way of life depends on making hundreds of small things work well. When we pay attention to the details, in every neighborhood, we will contribute to the economic and social vitality of the City as a whole. At the same time, when we have a vision for the City, we will strengthen each of the City's many neighborhoods and districts. That's why we have decided to embark on Mayor Menino's long-range planning process.

In a way, Boston is a tapestry. Each tile in the tapestry represents something that works. The three-deckers in Allston and the row houses of the South End. The Emerald Necklace park system designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The pedestrian walkways along the Charles River or Boston Harbor. Fenway Park and the Fleet Center. Attractive and diverse neighborhoods from Jamaica Plain to Charlestown. Historic sites from the Old North Church to the William Lloyd Garrison House that draw visitors from across the globe. A wealth of museums and galleries and concert halls. Dozens of colleges and universities. Unparalleled health care centers. One of the busiest - and most convenient - airports in the United States. A first-class public transit system.

Each of these pieces of the City is impressive in its own right. But what makes Boston a true international city is how they work together. We, as a community, owe it to ourselves and later generations to build on Boston's distinctive heritage. We owe it to ourselves and our neighbors to make a great city even greater.

The process of planning, the work of building communities, begins with questions. We need to ask questions, neighborhood by neighborhood and group by group, to devise a plan for Boston's 400th birthday.

Let us begin.

## FOR FURTHER READING

If you would like to read more about the principles of cities, planning, neighborhood life, and the importance of public and private spaces, you may wish to refer to the following books.

**Christopher Alexander, et al., *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). A lively guide to 253 "patterns" of life and space that make communities and buildings work well. Practical, readable, thought-provoking.

**Peter Calthorpe, *The Next American Metropolis: Ecology, Community, and the American Dream*** (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993). An overview of the principles of the "New Urbanism" movement, which has helped revive interest in the mixed-use planning approaches of traditional cities like Boston.

**Mike Greenberg, *The Poetics of Cities: Designing Neighborhoods That Work*** (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995). A San Antonio journalist's creative look at how community is strengthened, building by building, block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood.

**Allan B. Jacobs, *Great Streets*** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). A journey to some of the world's most lively streets to discover what makes them so great. Readable and informative.

**Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form*** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981). A classic by the late MIT teacher and Boston-area planner. Theoretical discussions and case studies set up an outline of the dimensions that make cities livable: vitality, sense, fit, access, control, efficiency, and justice.

**Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630*** (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992). A balanced overview of how Boston evolved from its founding in 1630 to the present day.

**Thomas H. O'Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal 1950 to 1970*** (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993). An analysis of how Boston transformed itself from an out-of-date city of declining industry and port activity, riven by ethnic tensions, into a city with a thriving downtown and a wide variety of cultural attractions.

**Susan and Michael Southworth, *The Boston Society of Architects' AIA Guide to Boston*** (Chester, Conn.: The Globe Pequot Press, 1992). An A to Z guide to Boston's neighborhoods and its architectural treasures. Broken down by neighborhoods, the guide includes hundreds of pictures of important structures as well as brief essays.

**Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth In Boston 1870-1900*** (New York: Atheneum, 1970). The story of Boston's physical growth by landfill projects and the absorption of the nearby towns of Dorchester, Roxbury, and West Roxbury.

**Gerda R. Wekerle and Carolyn Whitzman, *Safe Cities: Guidelines for Planning, Design, and Management*** (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1995). A straightforward overview of the factors that make for a safe community.

**Walter Muir Whitehall, *A Topographical History of Boston*** (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1959). A comprehensive history of Boston's physical development from a small peninsular community into a major city.

**William H. Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center*** (New York: Doubleday, 1988). A fascinating study of how people respond to different kinds of physical settings in the city, based on time-lapse photography of the behavior patterns in public spaces.

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